

W O R D P O W E R

El Poder de la Palabra

AMERICAN RHYTHMS: POETRY IN MOTION

Thursday, April 29, 1999

AT THE NEW JERSEY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

NJPAC
New Jersey PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

NJPAC'S ARTS EDUCATION DEPARTMENT celebrates the art of the written word with a trio of literary events that demonstrate the passion and power of language. We've assembled some of the area's most exciting literary voices —both established authors and emerging new artists — to present their work live and in an intimate setting. Hear words that inspire. Words that challenge. Words that explore the complex landscape of the human spirit.

SERIES CURATOR—NANCY MERCADO

**COME WITH US
AND CELEBRATE THE POWER
OF THE WORD**

NJPAC
New Jersey PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

ARTS EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
PRESENTS

WORD POWER

Thursday, April 29, 1999 • 7pm • NJPAC Banquet Hall

AMERICAN RHYTHMS: POETRY IN MOTION

Co-Sponsored by Passaic County Community College.

HOSTED BY
Maria Mazziotti Gillan

WITH
Laura Boss
Kurtis Lamkin
Joe Weil
Quincy Troupe
Gerald Stern
WITH MUSIC BY
Silk City Jazz

Hosted by

Maria Mazziotti Quinn

is the Director of the Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College. She has published several volumes of poetry including *The Weather Old Seasons* (Cross Cultural Communications) and *Where I Come From: Selected and New Poems* (Guernica). She is the editor of *The Paterson Literary Review* and has edited or co-edited several acclaimed anthologies including *Unsettling America: An Anthology of Contemporary Multicultural Poetry* and *Identity Lessons* (Penguin). Her work has been widely published and has won numerous awards. Her latest book, *Things My Mother Told Me*, is scheduled for release later this year.

With Music by

The Silk City Jazz Band

The Silk City Jazz Band includes Richard Sorce on keyboards, Willie Dorton on guitar, Guy Generals on drums, and John Hughes on bass. The group has performed throughout the greater metropolitan area. As individual musicians, Silk City Jazz members have accompanied a variety of recording artists including Eric Gae, Pachito and Cissy Houston.

At the Nuclear Rally

thinking of my father
who died of cancer of the pancreas
now linked to radiation

thinking of my father
who worked for the Atomic Energy
Commission
that ran security checks on him
questioning our neighbors in Woodbridge

thinking of my father
with a pen in his pocket
who could add four columns of figures
in his head but stayed poor
working for the OPA
while colleagues took
expensive presents

thinking of my father
who embarrassed me, singing in the car
with the radio on as I now do
who returned from government trips
with marzipan strawberries, bananas, grapes
who cooked Sunday breakfasts of chocolate
French toast (his special recipe)
and let my mother sleep late

thinking of my father
who smelled of Chesterfields
who never hit, never spanked me
told me he was glad I walked home
with the only black woman
in my high school class

thinking of my father
who would have been at this rally
next to me tonight

Laura Boss was a first prize winner in the Poetry Society of America's Gordon Barber Poetry Contest. The founder and editor of *Lips* poetry magazine, she was the sole representative of the U.S. at the XXVI Annual International Struga Poetry Readings in Yugoslavia in 1987. Her other awards include an American Literary Translators Award and two fellowships in creative writing from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State. Her books include *Stripping*, *On the Edge of the Hudson*, and the recent *Reports from the Front*. Her work was also recently published in *The New York Times*.

Maria Mazziotti Gillan

Arturo

I told everyone
your name was Arthur,
tried to turn you
into the imaginary father
in the three-piece suit
that I wanted instead of my own.
I changed my name to Marie,
hoping no one would notice
my face with its dark Italian eyes.

Arturo, I send you this message
from my younger self, that fool
who needed to deny
the words
(Wop! Guinea! Greaseball!)
slung like curved spears,
the anguish of sandwiches
made from spinach and oil;
the roasted peppers on homemade bread,
the rice pies of Easter.

Today, I watch you,
clean as a cherub
your ruddy face shining
closed by your growing deafness
in a world where my words
cannot touch you.

At 80, you still worship
Roosevelt and JFK,
read the newspaper carefully,
know with a quick shrewdness
the details of revolutions and dictators,
the cause and effect of all wars,
no matter how small.
Only your legs betray you
as you limp from pillar to pillar,

yet your convictions remain
as strong now as they were at 20.
For the children, you carry chocolates
wrapped in goldfoil
and find for them always
your crooked grin and a \$5 bill.

I smile when I think of you.
Listen, America,
this is my father, Arturo,
and I am his daughter, Maria.
Do not call me Marie.

Maria Mazziotti Gillan, the editor of *The Paterson Literary Review*, has published several volumes of poetry including *The Weather Old Seasons* and *Where I Come From: Selected and New Poems*. She is the co-editor of two anthologies, *Unsettling America* and *Identity Lessons* (Penguin). Her latest book, *Things My Mother Told Me*, is scheduled for release later this year.

jump mama

pretty summer day
grandmama sittin on her porch
easy
rockin her grandbaby in her wide lap
ol men sittin in their lincoln
tastin and talkin and talkin and tastin
young boys on the corner
milkin a yak yak
wild hands
baggy pants
young girls halfway up the block
playin
jumpin that double dutch
singin their song
kenna kana paula
be on time
cause school begins
at a quarter to nine
jump one two three and aaaaaah
round the corner comes
this young woman
draggin herself heavy home
from work
she sees the young boys
sees the old men
but when she sees the girls
she just starts smilin
she says let me get a little bit of that
they say you can't jump
you too old

why they say that

she says tanya you hold my work bag
chaniqua hold my handbag
josie could you hold my grocery bag
please
kebe take my purse
she starts bobbin her head
jackin her arms
tryin to catch the rhythm of the ropes
when she jumps inside
the turnin loops
the girls crowd her
sing their song
kenna kannia paula
be on time
cause school begins
at a quarter to nine
jump one two three and aaaaaah
she jumps on one leg- aaaaaah
she dances sassy saucy-aaaaaah
jump for the girls mama
jump for the stars mama
jump for the young boys sayin
jump mama jump mama
jump for the old woman sayin
aw go head baby
and what do the young girls say
what do the young girls say
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh

Kurtis Lamkin is a poet from Philadelphia who plays the Kora, a twenty-one string West African harp/lute. He has performed his work internationally with other Kora players, with jazz and dance ensembles, and in solo concert. Recent venues include the Gullah Festival and the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival. Mr. Lamkin has two recordings to his credit --- *My Juju* and *El Shabazz*. His dance poem *Psychic Lover* was performed at Harlem's Victoria 5 Theater, and a short animated film based on his *The Foxes Manifesto* has aired several times on PBS.

Joe Weil

Elegy For Lady Clairol

(for My Mother)

Lady Clairol has lost
her will to live;
We all saw it coming:
her stolid gaze;
that strained look
of cheap allegory
around the eyes.
She gathers her bravery now
into one last bright bouquet
as the sun sets over
a ruined postcard shop.

Ah lady, who can revive one hour
save one bright flower
from the arc of its decay?
Your breasts sag
and your teeth drop out,
like rose petals they fall,
and all around you—
T shirts and lepers!
the perfume of
boredom.

Men never understood you,
mistress of Proteus
as you were,
your hair changing hue, changing shade
in infinite flight
from their astounded hands.

Now, may the earth grow blonde
in your memory.
May its roots weep black
and refuse to be comforted.

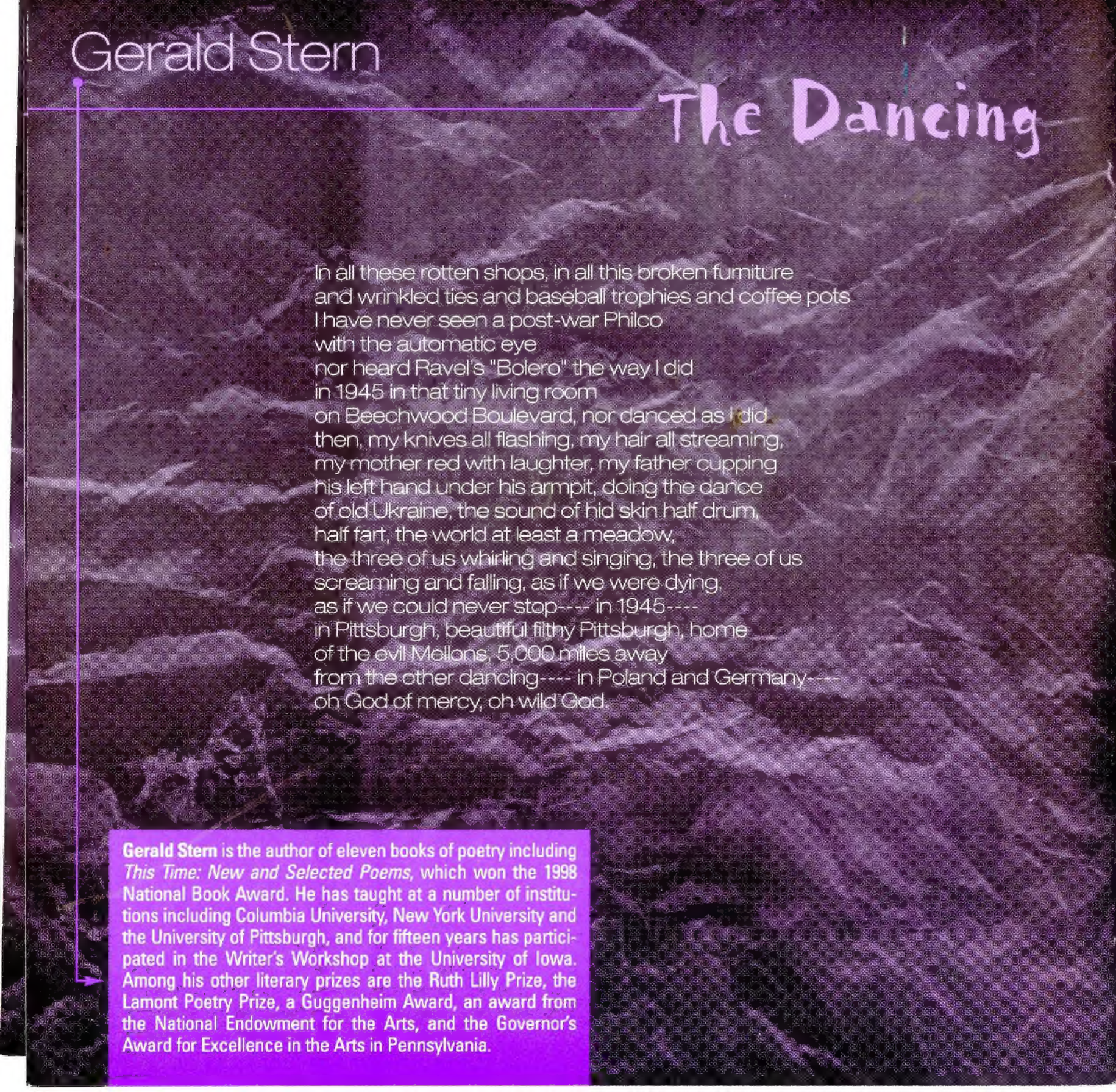
Joe Weil is the author of poetry, short stories and essays which appear regularly in literary journals such as *Poet Lore*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Red Brick Review*, *Lips* and *Long Shot*. He has been an activist for poetry in New Jersey for the past fifteen years, and is the founder and editor of *Black Swan Review*. Mr. Weil has been a featured reader on both National Public Radio and Pacifica Radio, sharing billing with such noteworthy poets as Allen Ginsberg, Philip Levine and Lorna Dee Cervantes. He has published three books of poetry, the most recent of which is *In Prai*.

In Texas Grass

All along the railroad
tracks of texas
old train cars lay
rusted & overturned
like new african governments
long forgotten by the people
who built & rode them
till they couldn't run no more
& they remind me of old race horses
who've been put out to pasture
amongst the weeds
rain, sleet & snow
till they die & rot away
like photos fading
in grandma's picture book
of old black men & women, in mississippi
texas, who sit on dilapidated porches

that fall away
like dead man's skin
like white people's eyes
& inside the peeling photos
old men sit, sad eyed
& waiting, waiting for worm dust
thinking of the master & his long forgotten
promise of forty acres & a mule
& even now, if you pass across
this bleeding flesh
ever changing landscape
you will see the fruited
countryside, stretching, stretching
& old black men & young black
men, sitting on porches, waiting
waiting for rusted trains
silent in texas grass

Quincy Troupe is the author of ten books including five volumes of poetry, the latest of which is *Avalanche*. He is the editor of *James Baldwin: The Legacy* and the co-author with Miles Davis of the best-selling *Miles: The Autobiography*. Mr. Troupe is the recipient of two American Book Awards and the 1991 Peabody Award. His works include the poetry collections *Snake-Back Solos*, *Embryo*, *Skulls Along the River*, *Weather Reports: New and Selected Poems*, and the forthcoming *Choruses*. He edited *Watts Poets and Writers* and co-edited *Giant Talk: An Anthology of Third World Writing*. His work has appeared in over 200 literary journals, anthologies, magazines and newspapers around the world.



Gerald Stern

The Dancing

In all these rotten shops, in all this broken furniture
and wrinkled ties and baseball trophies and coffee pots
I have never seen a post-war Philco
with the automatic eye
nor heard Ravel's "Bolero" the way I did
in 1945 in that tiny living room
on Beechwood Boulevard, nor danced as I did
then, my knives all flashing, my hair all streaming,
my mother red with laughter, my father cupping
his left hand under his armpit, doing the dance
of old Ukraine, the sound of hid skin half drum,
half fart, the world at least a meadow,
the three of us whirling and singing, the three of us
screaming and falling, as if we were dying,
as if we could never stop---- in 1945----
in Pittsburgh, beautiful filthy Pittsburgh, home
of the evil Mellons, 5,000 miles away
from the other dancing---- in Poland and Germany----
oh God of mercy, oh wild God.

Gerald Stern is the author of eleven books of poetry including *This Time: New and Selected Poems*, which won the 1998 National Book Award. He has taught at a number of institutions including Columbia University, New York University and the University of Pittsburgh, and for fifteen years has participated in the Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa. Among his other literary prizes are the Ruth Lilly Prize, the Lamont Poetry Prize, a Guggenheim Award, an award from the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts in Pennsylvania.

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